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Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul





BY
JOYCE
HOLLYDAY

Last August, those of us on the staff of the Southeast Conference converged on the mountains of western North Carolina near Bryson City for a three-day retreat at Sabbath House, staying in a small lodge perched at the top of a very steep ridge. From the lodge's spacious front porch we watched the sun rise and set, and the rain move in and out among the mountains around us, as we shared stories and hopes. It was a time of praying and planning, of feasting on Tim Downs' Thai food and listening to the poetry of Mary Oliver at the beginning and end of each day.

Tim proposed that it was time for a change in the motto of the Southeast Conference. We dreamed and brainstormed, throwing around a variety of ideas. Finally, through a group process, we came up with "Abiding in Christ, Abounding in Hope." That seemed to reflect two things that are very true of our Conference: that we find our strength in being rooted in our faith, and we are moving forward with great hope as our ministries and members grow.

Two months later, the Conference's Board of Directors met at Simpsonwood Retreat Center near Atlanta for the first of what we hope will be an annual retreat, with an agenda of developing a mission statement. I carried with me a treasure I found in the woods around my home: two entwined branches, thick and solid and almost as tall as I am. A member of the Board identified them as wisteria vines.

On our first evening together, we opened the scriptures to the 15th chapter of the Gospel of John and read Jesus' words: "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine,

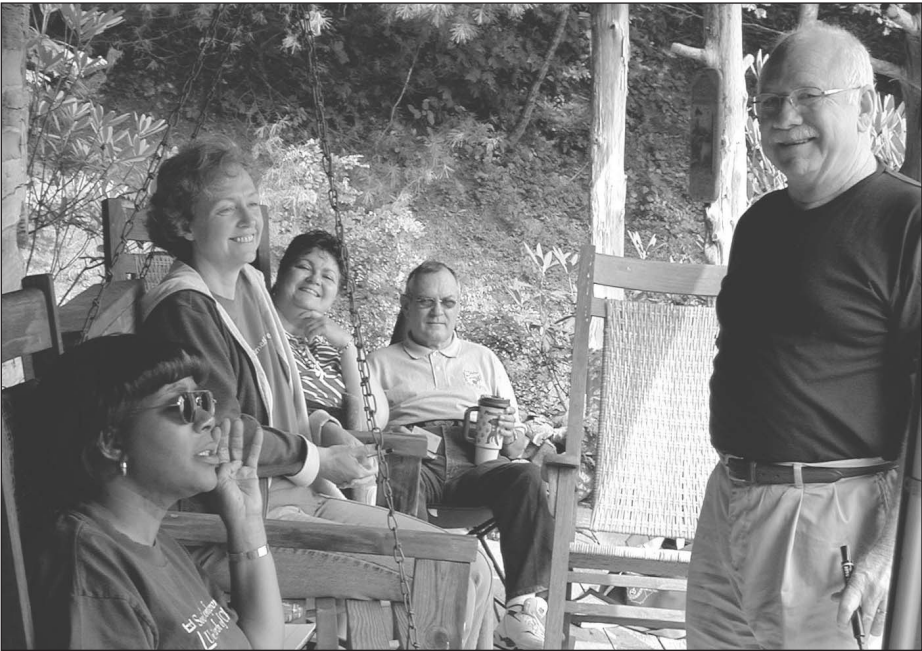
you are the branches."

Usually when I imagine vines, I picture that low, creeping, dark green English ivy that clings to the ground and brick walls. But I think that Jesus' image of a vine was likely closer to the one found in Psalm 80: "You brought a vine out of Egypt...it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent out branches to the sea, and its shoots to the river." Like kudzu in overdrive. Like two entwined wisteria vines with trunks the size of trees.

This is the kind of sturdy, flourishing, tenacious vine that reflects life in Jesus Christ. Unless we are rooted in Christ, we cannot bear fruit. But we in the Southeast Conference are reaping an abundant harvest. We have seen the truth of Paul's bold declaration in Romans 5: "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

As we begin another year together, I give thanks for being able to share more steps on the journey, and more days "abiding in Christ" and "abounding in hope."

Associate Conference Minister Joyce Hollyday is communications director for the Southeast Conference and co-director of "Rekindle the Gift," which is capturing the stories of our American Missionary Association congregations.



Staff members enjoy a moment on the big front porch during their annual retreat.

Board Meeting Highlights

At its meeting on November 13, 2004, held at First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, the Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference took the following actions:

- Reviewed the budget for 2005. In the initial draft, \$383,000 was budgeted in income, and \$451,000 in expenses, with a projected net loss of \$68,000 for the year. After a conversation in which the Board affirmed the current staff structure, and noted that program and operation expenses have been kept very lean, the Finance Committee agreed to review the budget for further development before sending it out to our congregations. The Board agreed that people contribute to a vision, not to budgets, and that we must articulate our vision more clearly.
- Reviewed a history of invested funds for the Southeast Conference.
- Affirmed the nominations of Bob Watson, a member of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, and Vickie Looser, a member of Congregational Christian UCC, Lanett, AL, to the Board of Directors.
- Received a report from the Local Arrangements Committee for General Synod XXV from Desiree Pedescleaux-Andrews, co-chair of the committee.

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 2005

- 4-5 PEPP (Disciples of Christ)/TAP Retreat, AL
- 4-5 Youth Ministry Leadership Training, Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA
- 11-12 Revival — Bethany Congregational UCC, Thomasville, GA
- 12 "Practicing in the Garden" Evaluation for 2004 participants, Sequatchie, TN
- 21 Presidents' Day — Conference Office Closed
- 25 ALA-TENN Church & Ministry, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN

MARCH 2005

- 5 GA-SC Association Spring Gathering, Virginia-Highland Church, Atlanta, GA
- 18-19 Board Meeting, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN
- 20-25 Holy Week — Conference Office Closed
- 25 ALA-TENN Church & Ministry, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN

APRIL 2005

- 1-2 Pre-Synod Event — Victory Church, Stone Mountain, GA
- 8-9 Revival — Lanett Congregational Christian Church, Lanett, AL
- 12 Ecumenical Meeting re: Disaster Relief Efforts, Atlanta, GA
- 15 Ordination of Derrick Rice, & Installation of Susan Mitchell & Derrick Rice, First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA
- 21 ALA-TENN Church & Ministry, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN
- 25-27 Graham Stewardship Cluster, St. Simon's Island, GA
- 29-30 Revival — Plymouth Congregational UCC, Charleston, SC

MAY 2005

- 12 Formula of Agreement Judicatory Meeting, Atlanta, GA
- 20-21 Uplands Retirement Village Board of Directors Meeting, Pleasant Hill, TN
- 27 ALA-TENN Church & Ministry, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN
- 30 Memorial Day — Conference Office Closed

JUNE 2005

- 10-11 Youth Ministry Leadership Graduation, Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA
- 24 ALA-TENN Church & Ministry, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN

JULY 2005

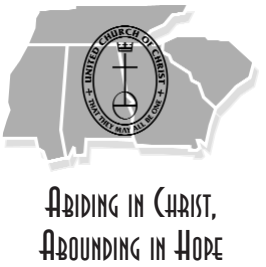
- 1-5 General Synod XXV, World Congress Center, Atlanta, GA
- 14-30 "Whole Body of Christ" Youth Trip, Seoul, South Korea



"I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL . . .
AND YOUR YOUNG SHALL SEE VISIONS AND
YOUR OLD SHALL DREAM DREAMS."

Acts 2:17

VOICES & VISIONS



SIX MONTHS AND COUNTING...

General Synod Is on its Way

By Desiree Pedescleaux-Andrews

We in the Southeast Conference have a rare opportunity just around the corner. The **25th General Synod of the United Church of Christ** will be held **July 1-5, 2005, in Atlanta**, at the Georgia World Congress Center. This biennial meeting of delegates, visitors, guests, and ecumenical partners typically includes 2,000 to 3,000 registrants, and Atlanta is sure to be a big draw. Hosting this event for our UCC family is a great honor!

About 900 delegates will come to Atlanta from throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. However, General Synod is far more than a business meeting. It is also an occasion for worship and inspiration — and an experience not likely to be forgotten. According to UCC national staff member Hans Holznagel, "At Synod, the United Church of Christ is on display in its wholeness, in a way that is hard to find elsewhere. [General Synod] is a destination and gathering place for various ministries and groups, which organize pre-Synod events, sponsored meals, workshops, after-hours events, and

exhibits. These Synod happenings feel alternately like teach-ins, revivals, celebrations, and social gatherings—sometimes all at once."

To ensure a successful General Synod, the Southeast Conference is soliciting your support and participation. **Volunteers are needed** for a host of committees, including hospitality, stage management, office support, registration, transportation, and public relations. Volunteer information forms may be requested from the Conference office via phone (404-607-1993; 800-807-1993) or email (ghudson@secucc.org). All are welcome to volunteer!

Since we are hosting this General Synod, the registration fee for members of the Southeast Conference will be \$40, rather than the usual cost of \$125. Information about registration will be available in early spring. Please look for it in the next edition of "Voices and Visions."

A pre-Synod event is being planned to raise awareness about the General Synod and to help raise the necessary funds for hosting it. The Southeast Conference will host a **Pre-Synod Convocation at Victory Church in**



Stone Mountain, Georgia, April 1-2, 2005. This event will feature preachers Jeremiah Wright, Renita Weems, and Joyce Hollyday. An exciting and spirit-filled weekend is being planned. Details will be mailed to church offices and posted on the Conference website (www.secucc.org).

General Synod can only be a success with all of the Southeast Conference churches participating. Come to Atlanta. "Come Listen, Go Serve — God Is Still Speaking."

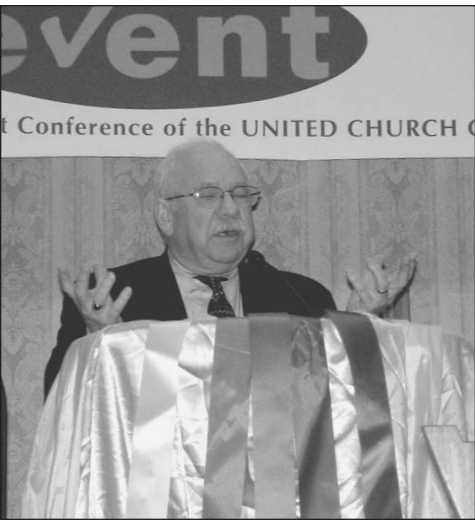
Desiree Pedescleaux-Andrews co-chairs the Local Arrangements Committee for General Synod with Associate Conference Minister Bennie Liggins.

National Evangelism Event Held in Atlanta

When the national UCC Evangelism "E-vent" came to Atlanta, the gifts of the Southeast Conference were on lavish display from beginning to end.

At the opening gathering, Tim Downs offered a welcome and blessing in the colorful worship space, designed by Kathy Clark, and Joyce Hollyday introduced keynote speaker Nancy Hastings Sehested. Susan Mitchell, who served as co-chair of the local organizing committee with Karl White, offered a moving gift of dance, and musicians from Sankofa Church drew the crowd together. The following morning, Angie Wright and musicians from Birmingham's Beloved Community Church lifted spirits during morning prayer, and Walter Brueggemann led an inspired and inspiring Bible

study. Bennie Liggins offered his expertise in new church development at an afternoon workshop. At the evening revival hosted by First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, Dwight Andrews extended the welcome, and singers and dancers from Victory Church brought the crowd to their feet, before Jeremiah Wright offered a rousing sermon. A host of volunteers, including Gerri Ryons-Hudson, Kim Shelton, Bette Graves Thomas, and Erna Bryant worked fervently behind the scenes to keep it all running smoothly.



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Dear Friends,

July 1-5, 2005: circle the dates in your calendars! We want you to plan to be at General Synod XXV at the World Congress Center in Atlanta. The Southeast Conference needs you as a volunteer to help us extend an extravagant Southern welcome to the entire United Church of Christ, as it



Conference can register for the General Synod for \$40, rather than the

full fee of \$125.

It is a rare and improbable honor for the Southeast Conference to be chosen to host the General Synod. We are the smallest in membership of the 39 conferences of the United Church of Christ, and the General Synod has never been held in the Deep South. But then, we have been an improbable people with rare gifts of ministry and mission throughout our history.

In a denomination that prides itself on its mission, many of our congregations are the fruit of a little-known story of courageous mission in the 19th century: the American Missionary Association effort that established 500 schools and 200 churches throughout

the South for recently emancipated slaves. In a UCC that has committed itself to a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic future, we point to the story of the formation of the Southeast Conference itself in the 1960s, which united at great cost congregations that served the

fiercely independent red clay farmers

of South Alabama with churches that served a proud people who had been disenfranchised by segregation. In a denomination that speaks of diversity, we are a people who have embraced those whose theology is rooted in a fervent 19th-century evangelical Christian tradition, which rose up out of tent revivals and “brush arbors,” and those who are rooted in the liberationist the-

ologies that are addressed to people dislocated by injustice and marginalized by society.

We are, at our best, a marvelous glimpse of what it means to be “the heady exasperating mix” we call the United Church of Christ—which is how I would describe the church of Jesus Christ from its inception. We who are part of the Southeast Conference hope to share our gifts of mission and diversity, and our love for both Jesus and justice, through special workshops, music, displays, and presentations throughout the course of the General Synod. We hope that you will be with us. Because without you, the gathering will not be complete.

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs
Conference Minister

Concerns and Celebrations

OUR SYMPATHY

To **Betsy Taylor Flory**, director of youth ministries, whose father-in-law died suddenly just before Thanksgiving.

CONGRATULATIONS

To **Trinity Congregational UCC**, Athens, AL, for receiving the One Great Hour of Sharing Blue Globe Award, granted to first-time participants in the special offering.

To **Sankofa UCC**, a new church start in Southwest Atlanta that was featured in *Trumpet*, the magazine of Chicago’s Trinity UCC.

To **Pilgrim Congregational UCC** in Birmingham, AL, for receiving first-place recognition from Birmingham AIDS Outreach (BAO), for its financial and volunteer support of people affected by HIV/AIDS. **First Congregational UCC** and **Beloved Community UCC** joined with Pilgrim in an annual fundraising march for BAO.

To **Carol Jean Miller**, on the recognition of the 20th anniversary of her ordination, held at Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA, on October 31, with Fred Craddock preaching.

To **Roy Bain**, who was celebrated in mid-October for his 14 years of ministry at Lanett Congregational Christian UCC, Lanett, AL, and for his leadership in the East Alabama-West Georgia Association, on the Board of Directors for the Southeast Conference, and as chair of the Allen Retreat Center.

To **Kenneth Samuel**, pastor of Victory Church, Stone Mountain, GA, on being elected to the presidency of the NAACP of Dekalb County, Georgia.

To **Stephanie Crumpton**, member of Sankofa UCC and part of the

Interim Ministry Team serving Bethany Congregational UCC in Thomasville, GA, for being chosen as a “Fund for Theological Education Scholar,” and for being selected to preach on the nationally broadcast religious radio program, *Day One*. Conference Minister **Tim Downs** was *Day One’s* preacher on November 14, 2004.

To Associate Conference Minister **Kathy Clark**, whose concern about her car (which is rapidly turning over the miles with all her travel for the TAP Program) appeared in the form of a question on the November 6 edition of National Public Radio’s *Car Talk*. Click and Clack the Tappitt Brothers suggested that she sell it. Anyone want an “almost new” Chevy Tracker with 40,000 miles in the service of Jesus on it?

THANK YOU

To **Mary Kendrick Moore**, who edited “Voices & Visions” with competence and creativity before moving in August to New York City, where her husband is attending seminary. Associate Conference Minister **Joyce Hollyday** is once again serving as communications director and newsletter editor for the Conference.

From Conference Minister **Tim Downs**, for the many cards, prayers, and well wishes received during his recent surgery and recovery.

MINISTRY TRANSITIONS

Linda Magyar was installed as pastor of First United UCC, Nashville, on October 24, 2004.

The Interim Pastoral Team of Bethany Congregational UCC, Thomasville, GA, was installed on October 3, 2004: **David A. Hooker**, a member of First Congregational UCC,

Atlanta; **Marlene Underwood** of GSN Ministries UCC, Atlanta; and **Stephanie Crumpton** of Sankofa UCC, Atlanta.

J. Dale Barrington, who was serving as pastor of Memorial United UCC in McGaheysville, VA, has accepted a call to serve as pastor of First UCC, Belvidere, TN.

Diantha Brown completed her interim ministry at First UCC in December.

Jim Deming has accepted a call to serve a second term as interim minister at Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville.

Jennifer Crane Moss, a member of Brookmeade Congregational UCC and a chaplain at Alive Hospice, was grant-

ed governmental ecclesiastical endorsement for her work at Nashville’s Veterans hospital.

Laurie Robins, who was ordained at South Congregational UCC in Waterbury, CT (a congregation served from 1979-1985 by Tim Downs), has accepted a one-year chaplaincy residency at North Atlanta Tri-Hospitals.

Michael Barbaro was ordained into Christian ministry at Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, on October 10, 2004.

Leah Fowler, a member of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, was unanimously recommended for the status of “ordainable pending a call” at an ecclesiastical council held November 20.

VOICES & VISIONS

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Voices & Visions, the Southeast Conference United Church of Christ section of the United Church News (USPS 764-070) is published four times a year. Its mission is to promote current events and conference news, offering information and inspiration to members. Views expressed in editorials, letters, and signed columns are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official Conference or UCC policies.

Article ideas and submissions may be directed to the Editor at jhollyday@seucc.org, or call 800-442-1064.

‘CALLED AS PEACEMAKERS’

Women Gather for Biennial Retreat



Leaders at the women’s retreat included Vanessa Robbs, Elaine Sipe, Rosemary McCombs Maxey, and Jill Hendrix (front row); Gisela Perez, Elmer Lavastida, Naomi Faust, Frances Bryant-Lowery, Ginny Nixon, and Maureen Jenci-Shelton (back row).

By Ginny Nixon

“Women in the World: Called as Peacemakers” was the theme for the women’s retreat of the Southeast Conference. More than 50 women gathered at Sumatanga Conference Center near Birmingham, Alabama, October 29-31, 2004.

Friday night we shared a combination worship service and dedication of contributions to Women’s Mite, the scholarship fund that helps women of the Southeast Conference attend educational and spiritual-growth events. Frances Bryant-Lowery of Victory Church led the worship, and Erna Bryant provided the background for Women’s Mite. A collection of \$430 was received for the fund.

On Saturday morning, keynote speaker Rosemary McCombs Maxey encouraged us to start our peacemaking in our own geographic place. She personally felt this sense of home country very strongly in the Georgia-Alabama area, where her Muscogee (Creek) people lived for centuries before they were moved to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears. She also challenged the group to “deconstruct and decolonize” the traditional images from Scripture: images of violence, of going forth, conquering others, and occupying land where others are already settled. We must find reconciliation, wholeness, and strength, she said, by re-imagining a kinder, gentler God.

Participants had three workshops from which to choose. Kim Miller led “Peace and Safety for Women,” on preventing and coping with domestic violence. Elaine Sipe led “Peace in the Golden Years,” on coping with the consequences of aging and with the possibility of being alone. And Lesley Brogan led “Journey to Spiritual Peace,” working with many resources on developing inner peace.

Elmer Lavastida and Gisela Perez, co-pastors of Second Baptist Church of Santiago de Cuba, led the afternoon session on “Working toward World Peace.” They described the ways Cubans are working for peace by sharing medicine, health services, and education with other countries, especially in the Caribbean and in Africa. They also explained the work and outreach of the ecumenical Christian Center for Training and Service B.G. Lavastida (named after Elmer’s father), which offers theological education in eastern Cuba, far from the seminaries in Havana.

Saturday evening featured a presentation on General Synod 2005 and a concert by Jill Hendrix and Maureen Jenci-Shelton, the two music leaders for the weekend. Their spirit-filled music, accompanied by a variety of unusual instruments, was a fitting conclusion to a full day.

In Sunday’s concluding worship, Rosemary McCombs Maxey’s sermon used the text of the Great Commission to call us to go really “into” the world, meeting others with respect and sharing our diversity of experiences of God. The Sunday offering of \$706 will be split evenly between the Christian Center for Training and Service B.G. Lavastida and the Eagle Butte Learning Center in South Dakota, both of which provide theological training for indigenous leaders close to their homes and families and the cultures they will serve. An offering of \$184 was received for expenses related to hosting General Synod. As they left the gathering, many participants expressed their belief that this was “one of the best women’s retreats we’ve had.”

Ginny Nixon is chair of the Southeast Conference Commission on Women in Church and Society.

Southeast Conference Weighs in on UCC “Stillspeaking” Campaign

In December 2004, the United Church of Christ launched a campaign organized around the theme “God is still speaking...” The central component was a television advertisement, marketed so that the average American TV viewer would see it five or six times. The theme of the 30-second ad is one of inclusivity and grace, a theme that will resonant with many of our congregations. A controversy erupted when NBC and CBS refused to air the ad, but it was shown on several other networks.

To prepare congregations to be “Stillspeaking” churches, the Southeast

Conference sent three people to be trained in Cleveland by UCC national staff. They are Paula Long of Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA; Dean Fowler of Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery, AL; and Sue Coulliette of Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN. They offered training events in the Southeast Conference on November 13 and December 4, and are available to consult with individual congregations, to introduce them to the “Stillspeaking” campaign and help them prepare to receive the visitors that we anticipate will come to congregations as a result of seeing the advertisement.

Cuban Pastors Visit Pleasant Hill

In addition to participating in the Southeast Conference women’s retreat, Elmer Lavastida and Gisela Perez spent two weeks in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee. The church they co-pastor, Second Baptist Church in Santiago de Cuba, is the sister church of Pleasant Hill Community United Church of Christ. They participated in a variety of activities, including a potluck dinner shared with the more than 30 people who have visited them in Cuba.

A talented pianist, Elmer performed at the Cuba Coffee House that was organized for their visit, along with several other virtuosos on the piano and organ. The Noters, the Pleasant Hill dulcimer group, opened the evening with Appalachian songs. A spirited auction of handmade pottery, quilts, and a basket helped to raise money for the scholarship fund for the next Cuba Seminar Trip, coordinated by Ted Braun. Coffee, chocolate, and teas, as well as a variety of homemade sweets, kept everyone happy at the gaily decorated, candle-festooned tables.

The following day, Elmer and Gisela led a workshop on Cuba, describing many of the outreach missions undertaken by the Cuban government, their church, and the ecumenical program chaired by Gisela in Santiago de Cuba. On Sunday, Elmer not only gave an inspiring sermon, but also played sacred music during the offertory. The Cuban pastors’ visit cemented the bonds between our two churches and our countries, extending the knowledge and feelings that have been generated by the yearly Cuba Seminar trips sponsored by the United Church of Christ.

Jean Clark

Jean Clark is a member of Pleasant Hill Community Church.



Elmer Lavastida entertains the crowd at Pleasant Hill.

Another round of television advertisements will air during Lent 2005. Now is the time to contact the Conference Office if you are interested in training members of your congregation to promote the “Stillspeaking” campaign, in preparation for the Lent cycle of advertisements. We believe that this effort will clarify UCC identity in many of our churches and surrounding communities, and we hope that many of our congregations will “opt in” to become “Stillspeaking” churches. Visit the web site (www.stillspeaking.com) and follow the directions to join up.

'Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters'

Alabama-Tennessee Association Celebrates a Unique Meeting

By Olin M. Ivey

The fall 2004 meeting of the Alabama-Tennessee Association broke new ground. In previous years, meetings were held at churches, with Friday evenings usually spent in worship and Saturday concentrated on conducting Association business. Don Clark, a member of Pleasant Hill Community Church and former chair of the Association's Social Justice Committee, approached the planning committee for last fall's meeting with an idea: "Let's have an environmental justice emphasis on water." That became the nucleus for a meeting that evolved into a unique social justice conference into which worship and business were woven.

The title "Just Water" was chosen as a way of highlighting the environmental justice emphasis, while playing on the way most humans take water for granted. Almost all the components of the conference were outside the norm of standard Association meetings. With the exception of 30 minutes of business on Saturday, all the activities revolved around the common theme of water.

The first component of the conference was a boat ride on the Tennessee River, captained by Leaf Myczack, the Tennessee River Keeper, who pointed out various ways that human activity despoils and otherwise damages the river. The second component, a behind-the-scenes tour of the Tennessee Aquarium, gave attendees the experience of viewing the way the aquarium makes things work in an environmentally sound way, including some areas where natural plants provide purification of the water.

Friday night's events, making up the third component, were held in the auditorium of the Tennessee Aquarium. John Mingus, pastor of Pilgrim Congregational UCC, the host church in Chattanooga, welcomed the Association and coordinated the evening. An after-dinner presentation in word and song by folklorist Dalton Roberts helped us see water through the eyes of a local politician, down-home philosopher, and newspaper columnist. The gathering viewed the video *Thirst*, which centers on the growing problem of the privatization of water and its subversion of cultures and economies. This was followed by a panel composed of John Gill, pastor of Church of the Savior UCC in Knoxville; Don Clark; nationally renowned environmental activist Sandy Kurtz; and Olin Ivey, who also preached that evening on the topic



Mary Alice Shepard, Ruth Peeples, Linda Magyar, and other members of the Alabama-Tennessee Association enjoy the Tennessee River tour.

"God, Water, and Chaos."

On Saturday morning John Gill offered a theological reflection titled "Watery Faith." This was followed by deeply meaningful reflections by youth who participated in the "Practicing in the Garden" summer program. Coordinated by Julie Mavity, these young people tailored their words around the conference theme: Marko Bajic and Rowan McGregor, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga; and Evan Flory and Zack Flory, Open Community UCC, Atlanta.

The conference then broke into workshops, focused on living simply with water, addressing pollution, and creating ecological strategies. Conference Minister Tim Downs offered reflections at the business session. The conference closed over lunch with a significant and delightfully humorous presentation by Leaf Myczack on how to enforce clean water rules.

While the youth and adult program was going on, the children were being led in their own multi-compo-

nent venture, developed by Pilgrim Church members Kim Hunt-Mingus, Matt Nevells, Christine Diwan, and John Mingus. They spent time at the Tennessee Aquarium with the sea horse display and enjoyed a vigorous, interactive program at the Creative Discovery Museum called "Riverplay." Intentionally providing the children with significant programmatic opportunities throughout the conference formed a major element in making the weekend truly distinctive.

While it may be too much to say this Association meeting fashioned a new paradigm for our fall gatherings, it certainly broke new ground—not only in organizing itself as a conference built around a major theme of ministry, but also in its inclusiveness across all generations. But, then again, it's "Just Water."

Olin M. Ivey, Associate for Stewardship and Outreach at Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, served as coordinator of the "Just Water" conference.

January 2005, Tim has been teaching a course at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta on Monday evenings, and on Wednesday afternoons at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, in collaboration with Conference Moderator Dorothy Gager.

Uplands Retirement Village in Pleasant Hill, TN, is launching a capital campaign: "Visions! The Campaign for Uplands' New Century of Care and Mission." The goal for this effort, which is chaired by **Dick Braun** of **Pleasant Hill Community Church** and dedicated to building a new nursing care center, is to raise \$4 million. The church is also involved in raising money for the Matanzas Seminary Graduates' Book Fund, an effort to provide theological books for every graduate of the Matanzas Seminary in Cuba. This effort is a visible expression of the partnership with Cuba that the Southeast Conference affirmed at its Annual Meeting in 2001. To make a contribution, contact **Tom Warren**, pastor of Pleasant Hill Community Church, P.O. Box 167, Pleasant Hill, TN 38578.

In November, **Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga**, and **Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta**, collaborated in supporting one another in the "Consecrating Stewards" program. **John Mingus**, pastor of Pilgrim Congregational, was the featured preacher and "guest steward" at Central, and **Lesley Brogan**, an associate pastor at Central, was the preacher and "guest steward" at Pilgrim. **Walter**

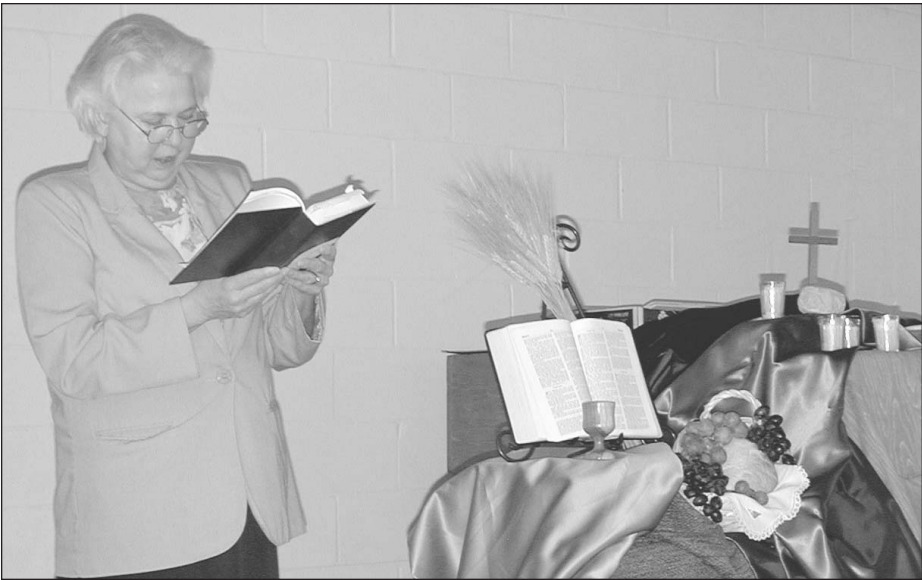
Brueggemann, a member of Central and recently retired professor from Columbia Theological Seminary, made a presentation on giving out of a spirit of abundance at a stewardship dinner held at Central.

United Church of Cookeville, TN, a new church start, took a successful mission trip to the Heifer Project Farm in Little Rock, AR. Members of the church have been active supporters of the Heifer Project, which provides livestock and supplies to families in need around the world.

The **Southeast Conference** is collaborating with other denominations in a variety of important concerns. The Conference is supporting an advertisement campaign initiated by the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, seeking to increase awareness about clergy sexual abuse and to inform church members about available resources. Staff members of the Southeast Conference, the Southeastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta (PCUSA), the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta met to foster an exchange of information about ministries and open opportunities for collaboration. And seminarians from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ gathered with clergy from those denominations for the Atlanta United Divinity Center's Fall Banquet.

'Revive Us Again!'

East Alabama-West Georgia Association Holds Annual Gathering



Wanda Bain reads scripture at the East Alabama-West Georgia revival.

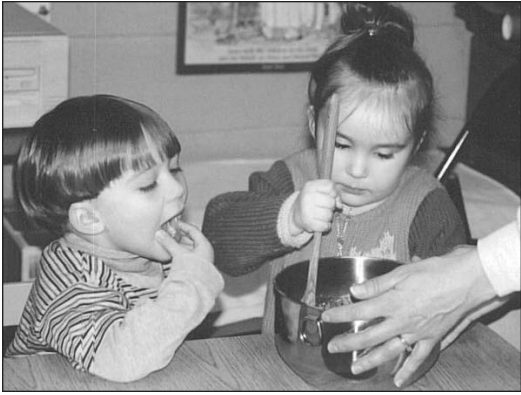
The East Alabama-West Georgia Association held its annual revival October 17-19, 2004, at the Allen Retreat Center in Lafayette, Alabama. Organized by Barry Brooks, pastor of Pleasant Grove Congregational Christian UCC in Lafayette, the event was gathered under the theme "Revive us Again!" Preaching the first evening was Ben Rose, a student at Candler School of Theology, who is serving in supervised ministry at North Main Congregational Christian UCC in Roanoke, Alabama. The second evening featured Anthony Herren, the newly called pastor at Antioch Christian UCC in Roanoke. And the final evening was led by Rip Hardman, the pastor of Russell Woods Congregational Christian UCC, Phenix City, Alabama. Seventy people attended the final service, and a mass choir of 15 voices led the group in old favorite gospel songs. Each evening featured a potluck meal following the time of worship.

The 73rd Annual Meeting of the East Alabama-West Georgia Association took place on Saturday, October 16, at the Allen Retreat Center. The focus of the event was to celebrate the spirit of

renewal that is taking root in the Association, most notably through the TAP (Theology Among the People) Program, and the ACTS (Active Churches Touching Society) initiative. Through both of these programs, the Association has reached out to all of its congregations, offering opportunities for the training of lay and licensed leadership and guidance in some of the essentials of congregational renewal. Singing hymns ranging from "He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought" to "Tis So Sweet to Trust Jesus," those gathered participated in a warm and celebrative event. Following lunch and a full range of annual reports, Conference Minister Tim Downs installed all the officers of the Association—Moderator Wayne Washburn (pastor, Elder Christian UCC, Dadeville, AL), Vice-moderator Donnie Perry (member, Corinth Christian UCC, Wadley, AL), Treasurer Don Harmon (member, Lanett Congregational Christian UCC, Lanett, AL), Secretary Betty Moon (member, North Main Congregational Christian UCC, Roanoke, AL) — and the chairs of all Association committees.

Room in the Inn

Since 1987 Brookmeade Congregational UCC in Nashville, Tennessee, has been providing emergency overnight shelter for homeless people. In collaboration with other Nashville congregations, the church is participating in a program called Room in the Inn, which provides shelter for 185 to 225 people every night from November 1 through March 31. Last winter 156 congregations provided 28,964 beds and served more than 70,000 meals. One very special evening, children from Brookmeade Church, under the direction of church school leaders Michelle Fowke and Betty Hahn, prepared from scratch a meal of lasagna, green beans, rolls, ice cream, brownies, and lemon bars. They shared the meal at tables with homeless guests, then joined them in watching a video. "Jesus taught us that we should love and respect all of God's children regardless of their station in life," said Michelle Fowke. That's the belief the children were putting into practice.



Children mix and sample the brownie batter.

Hurricane Response

Last fall, the Southeastern United States experienced a hurricane season unlike any other in recent memory. Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne followed closely on one another's heels, forcing cancellation of events, including the Georgia-South Carolina Association Annual Meeting and a Southern regional UCC staff retreat, and wreaking unprecedented damage.

Last spring, members of one of our newest churches, United Church of Cookeville, Tennessee, assembled 50 disaster kits to be distributed in the event of just such an emergency. Each kit contained a toothbrush, toothpaste, washcloth, soap, emery board, and band aids, wrapped in a hand towel and placed inside a plastic bag. Members of First United UCC in Nashville assembled kits of stuffed animals, toys, and crayons for children who lost everything in the hurricanes. The kits were delivered by Will Rabert, coordinator of the Southeast Conference Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART), to the

Port Charlotte, Florida area after hurricane Ivan passed through there.

Will was deployed by Conference Minister Tim Downs and Florence Coppola, executive director of Disaster Ministries for the United Church of Christ. He went to Florida's panhandle to work in partnership with Bill Wealand, the Florida Conference's disaster coordinator. He attended VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) meetings, assessed damage to dwellings, recruited and trained a case worker from the UCC church in Pensacola, and directed UCC volunteers from the area. Will said that he has worked tornadoes and seen hurricanes, but this was the first time he had seen such damage from both, and from the resulting combination of high winds and water. He is grateful for the opportunity to serve in disaster recovery, and we are very thankful that he is our representative on the ground in emergencies.

The Power and Promise of Peace'

Local and national members of the United Church of Christ family played a critical role in an October 2004 annual gathering of the United States Conference for the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Atlanta. Andrew Young served as an honorary president of the event along with Martin Luther King III. Budd Friend-Jones, a vice moderator for the conference, organized the workshops. Dwight Andrews served on the planning committee, and First Congregational UCC in Atlanta hosted jazz vespers and a reception. UCC national staff members who participated included General Minister and President John Thomas, Lydia Veliko, Loey Powell, and Bernice Powell Jackson, who was recently elected president of the U.S. Conference of the WCC.

Focused on the World Council of

Church's "Decade to Overcome Violence: The Power and Promise of Peace," the conference covered issues ranging from the personal to the global, including suicide, domestic violence, terrorism, and the war in Iraq. Ten "Blessed Are the Peacemakers" awards were given out by WCC General Secretary Samuel Kobia. Recipients included the Atlanta Chapter of Adopt-a-Minefield, chaired by Joyce Myers-Brown, for its work to rid the world of landmines; and First Congregational UCC in Atlanta, for its commitment to racial equality, dating back to its provision of the only integrated public water fountain in Atlanta in 1909.



Night of a Thousand Dinners

"Night of a Thousand Dinners" is an international event that creates awareness of the global landmine crisis and raises much-needed funds for landmine removal. Between 45 million and 60 million landmines are in the ground in 68 countries. Every year these landmines maim or kill more than 15,000 men, women and children. Those who survive endure a lifetime of physical, psychological, and economic hardship.

On the evening of November 4, 2004, and in the weeks following, tens of thousands of people around the world gathered with friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues to share a meal and make the world a safer place. It's not too late to join this effort. Plan whatever suits your time and budget—a small meal, dessert party, tea, or potluck in your home, church, or organization—or entertain at a restaurant—and ask your guests to make a donation for landmine removal.

The United Nations Association-USA, Atlanta Chapter, has raised more than \$90,000 since 1999 for the clearance of six minefields in Mozambique and is hoping to clear a seventh. Help turn fields of fear into fields of hope! Donations are tax deductible. Checks should be made out to Adopt-a-Minefield, UNA-USA, Atlanta, and sent to UNA-USA, Atlanta, P.O. Box 11662, Atlanta, GA 30355. For further information, brochures for your guests, and/or a video, call Adopt-a-Minefield Chair Joyce Myers-Brown at 404-876-2421.



Abiding in Christ, Abounding in Hope

Around the Conference

Salim Church, a Korean-American congregation seeking affiliation with the UCC, led by seminary students **Andrew Kim** and **Sarah Kim**, held its first worship service at Church of the Savior in Roswell, GA, on November 21, 2004.

On November 16, 2004, members of **Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA**; **Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA**; **United Church, Cookeville, TN**; **First Congregational UCC, Atlanta**; **Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta**; and **Sankofa UCC, Atlanta**, participated in a gathering sponsored by The Fund for Theological Education, to explore ways in which they as congregations can identify and nurture individuals, especially young people, to prepare for ordained ministry.

Conference Minister **Tim Downs** has been teaching courses in UCC History and Polity in seminaries around the Conference for six years. Beginning in



Immersions for Conversion

Creative Ventures in Youth Ministry

By Betsy Taylor Flory

We don't have a traditional youth ministry in this Conference. We don't measure our success in large crowds, splashy performances by big names, or emotional conversions—although we have those and are grateful for them. We count success when mountaintop moments turn into the sustained process of conversion that leads us to embody our beliefs; that is, to put our bodies in places where we may act on the ideas and emotions of our faith.

Last June, we literally *practiced* knowing God through respectful relationship with creation. With the support of a grant from the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith, several youth from the Southeast Conference shared an immersion experience called “Practicing in the Garden” on Bill and Miriam Keener’s organic farm in Tennessee’s Sequatchie Valley. Some of the youth offered testimonies from their time on the farm as part of the Alabama-Tennessee Association’s annual meeting on “Just Water.” Our 10 days on the farm were such a success that we’re plan-

ning to repeat the experience next June.

In the fall I presented our “Practicing in the Garden” project at a conference on ecology and liturgy held at Holden Village, a retreat center in the Cascade Mountains of Washington state. There I met other people working faithfully to encourage the church to remember that justice for human beings cannot be separated from justice for the creation. I left with relationships and resources that will be turned to the development of a seminary practicum/internship based on the same principles of embodiment we used to create “Practicing in the Garden.”

I was also a panelist last fall at Candler School of Theology’s YTI (Youth Theology Institute) Conference in Atlanta. Gathered around the theme “New Visions in Youth Ministry,” theorists and practitioners met and shared ideas. I came away with resources we’ll use to create another immersion that uses story, drama, and creative writing to help young people put their bodies into the remarkable story of the church, and to tell their own stories to see how they are entwined with this larger one.

Next summer our youth will see a larger piece of the whole body of Christ by taking

our bodies to Seoul, South Korea, July 14-31. We’ll work in BoGum Church’s outreach to the elderly poor. We’ll encounter a church that grew up in a non-Christian setting, and discover new ways to understand our own. We also hope in the future to partner with congregations from the American Missionary Association tradition that are part of the Conference’s “Rekindle the Gift” ministry, to hear how our forerunners in the faith used their bodies to resist injustice and how young people today can do the same.

We are blessed to work with so many people who have taken their faith and given it feet for travel, hands for hard work, strong backs for heavy burdens, and voices to lift in praise. Our youth ministry has as its vision the creation of more “embodied” Christians to join our ranks. Please go to the Youth Page at www.secucc.org to see picture albums of these immersion experiences and information about upcoming Conference, regional, and national youth events.

Betsy Taylor Flory is Director of Youth Ministry for the Southeast Conference.

“There is nothing in this world quite like the experience of farming. In a garden, you notice a transformation of actions and objects in which your hard work becomes the vegetables and food that you need to survive. Your toil feeds the animals, which feed the Earth and start the cycle again, but it cannot happen without the toil you put in to start this cycle.

A unique part of the farm experience is the peace of body and mind one can achieve there. Now, more than ever, people tend to live their lives in fear and worry about everyday events that take place in our world. The Keeners’ farm is pure because it is untouched by the outside world, and it’s closer to Eden than our metal and concrete cities. You see nature and God’s work in it, and you learn how to co-exist with it.

By the end of the farm day, with all the hard work done, your body aches and exhaustion catches up to you, but you still feel proud. You feel proud of yourself because this is who you are, and the toil you have done is what you are capable of. This is how you find peace with yourself and all things around you. By helping the Earth, you find peace with God.”

Marko Bajic



Feeding the chickens.

“Having worked on the farm and been in continuous discussion about interconnectivity, I reached a heightened state of awareness of our interdependence on one another to live out healthy and ecologically sound lives. During our work on the farm, we were constantly made aware of water. We used water to wash, water to swim in, lots of water to drink and cook, and most important, we came to realize that water is the vein of all that lives and flourishes. Those of us living in suburbia can become detached from all that we depend on; the highway becomes the vein of dependence rather than water and more natural means of reliance.

Using water as a tool to practice faithfulness will create a justice as widespread as the path of water. Justice is an epidemic. Once we determine and decide to act on our knowledge of interconnectedness, one injustice will fall soon after the last. Water’s colossal force over justice and, more basically, our individual well-being, is essential to the change that has to be made in how we decide to act.”

Zack Flory

“Pulling pigweed is a powerful spiritual practice. Pigweed grows three to four feet tall, with taproots just about as long, and needle-like spines that draw blood as you grope for the proper grip on the tenacious plant. It took all our physical strength to tug, pull, and pry the weeds from the dirt in the tomato beds. And some mornings it took all our spiritual strength to make our tired, sore bodies get up and begin again. But there is something clarifying about committing your whole person—body, heart, mind, and soul—to daily work that is literally your daily bread. The fruits of our labors were plentiful and oh so sweet, as sweet as the blueberries we picked (and ate) and boxed for market, as sweet as the deep conversations savored in the rows, as sweet as impossible amounts of work rendered possible by teamwork, or wonderful meals picked from the fields and shared with family, workers, and neighbors. We learned firsthand the countless ways we are connected to God, the earth, and our fellow human and non-human beings.”

Betsy Taylor Flory

“One of my best memories from this past summer was going to the farm. The weather was fabulous (different every day!); the food was natural (organic—and VERY yummy); everybody treated everyone else like family; and basically it was just a week of work dissolved in fun. Although by the end of each day everyone was tired and stinky (at least I was), nothing worse than the skunks squirting their stench around the house where we stayed ever happened. Before I went on this trip, I was the sort of girl who couldn’t take a jog in the park without putting some eyeliner on. But after I went on this trip, something changed in me—and I was able to be myself more. I thank everyone who helped make this trip happen, and I really look forward to another chance like this.”

Hanna Cho



Shoveling manure on the organic farm.

“Practicing in the Garden” made a huge difference in the way I and several other individuals choose to live our lives. This eye-opening experience was not a big, expensive trip. There were no airplane tickets, drawn-out itineraries, or expansive waivers. Our mission on this trip was one word long: work. We did many things, but every step we took, every breath we took, and every thing we saw was more important and more precious during this week.

From the moment you see the Keeners’ farm, you know this cannot be where the tomatoes and corn that you buy at Kroger come from. You find yourself looking around, wondering how the week ahead will fair, considering the lack of shade in the field—something you don’t think about when you buy tomatoes at a grocery store—the expanse of the farm, which you will be traversing on foot, the heat of the sun above and the humidity of the air stuck between the two mountains.

The first day goes slowly, and you sigh in relief as you hit your pillow and fall asleep. The second day is easier, and you start to see the things that you were meant to see. When you look over the green fields, you see God in the most perfectly manifested embodiment imaginable. The daily tasks of picking berries (gallons at a time), weeding fields, spreading manure, baling hay, moving sheep and chickens, feeding animals and gathering eggs were a challenge, but we could not think of anything comparable to the satisfaction that comes with the sweat of real work.

We went canoeing and swam in the river. We hiked to a waterfall, fed by a spring in a cave where there was water that we actually drank from the ground—something many of us had never done before. On a rainy day we all rushed to the rope swing to take turns swinging in the rain. These were the moments in which we realized the importance of the world we were in. We found out how work, play, and the gifts of God’s world tie into living a healthy and natural life.”

Evan Flory

From the Moderator

Giving Thanks

By Dorothy Gager

As I write this article, I am anticipating Thanksgiving Day, and it is with much gratitude that I think about the privilege of serving the Southeast Conference. I am filled with wonder at the quality and quantity of gifts coming from God’s work within this Conference. This was especially the case when the Board of Directors sat with our fine Conference staff last fall, to hear them describe the incredible programs that they are implementing on our behalf.

The book growing out of **Rekindle the Gift**, which captures the story of the American Missionary Association churches established in this Conference more than 100 years ago, is nearing completion. Through this ministry, Joyce Hollyday has preserved a part of the UCC’s history that has not been recorded and could easily have been lost. What a wonderful gift for the Southeast Conference to offer to the rest of the United Church of Christ!

The **TAP (Theology Among the People) Program** continues to grow. Building on the strong foundation laid by Dick Sales in his work first in Africa and then in our Conference, Kathy Clark has traveled all over our wide geographic area training leaders, teaching classes, and refining curriculum. The high quality of this program has captured the attention of other denominations in this area, another gift from the Southeast Conference to the UCC and others interested in this kind of intensive theological study.

Betsy Taylor Flory has taken an innovative approach to **Youth Ministry** by developing a series of immersion experiences that give our young people the opportunity to have personal, in-depth encounters with the important social and theological issues of our time. From an organic farm in Tennessee’s Sequatchie Valley to a building site in Juarez, Mexico, to a church in Seoul, South Korea, our youth are having their eyes and hearts opened to new experiences and convictions. Young people with a solid foundation in the church and in the important issues of the day are a gift that we offer to a nation and a world sorely in need of a new generation of leaders.

Bennie Liggins shares his knowledge and enthusiasm for **New Church Development** with the pastors and congregations involved in these endeavors, giving the gift of new places for people to worship God and spread the Good News. Will Rabert has had a busy year coordinating **Disaster Response** efforts on our behalf, seeing that supplies collected by our congregations are distributed where needed most and tending to the spiritual and physical needs of hurricane victims in Florida.

Although usually behind the scenes, Gerri Ryons-Hudson brings to the **Conference Office** her gifts of organization, attention to details, and amazing patience, humor, and fortitude as she deals with so many personalities, problems, and programs. And then there is Tim Downs, our **Conference Minister**, who has assembled this amazing staff and created a unique model of Conference ministry, in which we utilize our staff to implement programs that are beyond the scope of individual congregations. What amazing gifts from this Conference that is small in numbers and scattered over such a wide geographic area! That’s a lot to be thankful for.